

## REPORT ON CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE

**Dates:** 2-6<sup>th</sup> August 2009

**Organized by:** SDS-IPAC

**Facilitated by:** SDS-IPAC New Delhi, Entrée Netherlands

**Supported by:** Cordaid Netherlands

**Venue:** Cambay Hotel Resort, Gandhi Nagar

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A workshop on Women in Governance was organised at Ahmedabad, Gujarat, from 2<sup>nd</sup> August to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2009. Some women's groups from Northeast India and from the Dalit Community from south came together to form a network of women to work towards bringing women into governance positions. To achieve this objective, a series of conferences were held to bring these groups together to develop an action plan and as a result of this a strategic Conference was held in Ahmedabad from 2<sup>nd</sup> August to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2009 to tie up and identify like-minded women groups from Northeast India and Dalit Community, working on similar concerns.

Govert Van Oord from Entrée Netherlands and Narendra Kumar from SDS-IPAC India were the chief facilitator in the workshop. Each day of the workshop had a special issue to focus on. The content began with personal empowerment from victim to rights defender. The second day agenda was legal protection for poor women as well as women human rights defenders. The third day was dedicated to leadership and political empowerment. On the last day, the workshop participants worked to finalize action plans, networking, group works and planning of future possibilities for cooperation. Some Pledges were taken at the end of the workshop to work on strategies related to economic security of women, possible ways to deal with customary law, capacity building of stakeholders (especially WHRDs, victims) and security issues related to women.

First session of first day started with the welcome note by Govert followed by the introduction of individual participants. Every participant was asked to tell the audience his/her name, organization and expectations from the conference. Besides formal information, lot of participants contributed also with their own personal stories and motivations that lead them to becoming active.

**The first key note** of day first was titled as "Process of overcoming one's victim hood" presented by Dr. Bimol Akoijam, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He identified the victim hood as violation of the qualified life.

Concluding his key note he said that to shift victims to actors, the crucial condition is to move from justice to victims to victims for justice. That means to involve victims in

governance and human rights movement, so that they can participate and achieve that kind of experience they suffered will not happen again.

**Second key note** was presented by Dr Shewli Kumar of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, titled as "Position of Dalit women in community". She left with three questions:-

1. How to work towards empowering the 'self' in women to make governance an anti-oppressive and gender-equal process?
2. Where are the opportunities within the democratic structure (local, state, national and international) women can use to leverage empowerment?
3. Is there a need to build solidarities beyond the existing groups to expand the power base to address inequalities? E.g., other marginalised women - Muslim women, single, widowed women.

After the keynotes three case studies of women violence were shared by participants followed by the discussion on the same.

**Second day** of the workshop started with the reflection on the first day's activities followed by two key notes. First key note was shared by Mr. Babloo Loitongbam, Human Rights Alert, Imphal on "Legal Protection for Women Human Rights defenders". Concluding the note he said that the declaration on human right defenders as such does not give new rights to HRDs, but puts them together and brings them into new perspective. There is of course a question if it is appropriate to write to UN, if it is good to put shame on your country on international scene, but we mustn't forget that government promised to follow some rules and rights internationally, so HRDs have right to seek justice on international ground. There are obviously many other questions we have to answer, for example how to demand these rights domestically and if there should be new law for HRDs. On domestic level, some possibilities are courts, National Human Rights Commission, National Commission for Women and National Commission for SC/ST.

Second key note was presented by Ms Naina Bhatt, lawyer, Ahmedabad. She shared her practical experience as an advocate on criminal side, as a public prosecutor and currently defense lawyer.

The next session of the second day was dedicated to group work where participants have to discuss three questions: 1) **How to strengthen the role of women in governance?** 2) **How to release the power within?** 3) **How to promote/support the ambitions of women to decide and change?**

Third day of the workshop started with the key note of Govert Van Oord on "lobby for influencing decision makers" where he said that if you are able to change policies, it may be much more effective than fieldwork as it has a wider impact. It is important to keep on mind that working with the public decision makers does not mean becoming one of them.

In general, there are two possible kinds of actions we can choose for influencing decision makers. We can go for confrontation or dialogue and we can go either for direct action or for a carefully planned action. The challenge for every organization is to develop the feeling when to use what kind of instrument. Subsequently it is possible to take advantage of our feelings and the circumstances. Planned cooperative actions include lobby, public affairs and counselling. Planned actions exercised in confrontational manner are campaigns, demonstration letters and advocating. Cooperative direct actions could be effort to find practical solution on the ground. On the other hand, in case of activism or protests we talk about confrontation.

Narendra Kumar in his key note was focused on “Rationales or the sources of lobbying initiative”. He also emphasized on the process of law making in India and entry point for lobbyist in that process.

The next session started with a discussion on Female MPs where it was mentioned that although female parliamentarians are younger than their male colleagues, their education profile is similar. Later one case study was shared by Ribi from Arunachal Pradesh on Problem with extensive Dam construction in Arunachal Pradesh. She also connected this with the problem women are facing due to dams. The third day of the workshop was ended with the group exercise where all the participants have to discuss about four things and prepare the action plan on the same which includes: 1) **Capacity building for Women in Governance.** 2) **Role of customary law Vs regular law and its effect on women.** 3) **Personal security and, Economic security.**

On fourth day group work continued and participants shared their goals for the above mentioned four things and strategies via these goals will be achieved. Later on every group had a task to define major goals to achieve and to develop plan of actions for next year.

The first group on capacity building decided to organize a personality development training which will deal with insecurities, inhibitions and help women to realize their potential, learn about their strengths and build self-confident women. The second priority is to organize a facilitator training on democracy and peace.

Group on security decided to document the cases of violation of rights of Women Human Right Defenders, training on Human Rights monitoring, and mapping policy makers for lobbying on national security.

Group on Economic security and customary law decided to identify more groups and bring more like-minded women to this network.

At the end of the workshop, following pledges taken by participants

- a) Training on personal development, responsible person - Jyothi
- b) Facilitator training Democracy and peace, responsible person - Jayanti, Manipur steering committee
- c) Data collection on security of WHRDs, responsible person – Manjula and Guni
- d) HR monitoring training, responsible person – Gunie and Manjula

- e) Build network of indigenous women concerning customary law, responsible persons - Bondita, Seema
- f) Recognize women agricultural work as skilled labour, responsible person - Helam
- g) Support the Steering committee for the networking, responsible person - Noni